

CHAPTER 2 KEY POINTS

Public involvement is a critical component during the early project planning stage. Public input helps identify transportation users, needs, and preferences.

Transportation 2030 takes a three-pronged approach to public involvement: a telephone survey, interviews/focus groups, and community outreach. This approach has helped UDOT understand user needs and prioritize projects.



[Click here for the UDOT Planning webpage.](#)

Chapter 2

Community Outreach and Early Public Involvement

2.1 Overview

2.1

Extensive public involvement was conducted for Transportation 2030 to form a database of stakeholder comments to incorporate with UDOT statistical transportation data. Public involvement fosters an open decision-making process and elicits active participation from affected individuals, groups, and communities. A baseline telephone survey, individual interviews, focus groups, and community outreach were conducted to help UDOT planners understand statewide community needs.

In addition to specific community outreach activities conducted in preparing Transportation 2030, the Transportation Commission has for many years conducted an on-going community outreach program. Several of the monthly Commission meetings each year are rotated to various communities throughout the state, to allow local leaders to showcase their concerns and to give the public more direct access to the Commission.

Public input for the long-range plan was achieved through a statewide telephone survey, in-depth interviews, focus groups, community outreach meetings, mail, e-mail, and phone comments.

2.2 Objectives

2.2

Transportation 2030's primary public involvement objective was to identify, quantify, and evaluate the issues of importance for all types of transportation users. The purpose was to educate communities about UDOT's planning and decision-making processes and seek input on specific needs. These broad objectives were met by accomplishing the following specific goals:

- Conduct a baseline survey to establish measurable results for future comparison
- Establish relationships with communities throughout Utah to lay the groundwork for future planning and public involvement activities
- Provide information on UDOT's long-range planning and decision-making processes through community presentations and other resource materials
- Establish a foundation for ongoing public input through in-depth meetings, individual interviews, focus groups, and phone, e-mail, and web comments
- Gather input for design, construction, and maintenance projects

2.3 Strategies and Results of Public Involvement

Over 20 percent of Utahns surveyed had participated in UDOT transportation decision-making in the following ways:

- Receiving project updates
- Attending meetings
- Writing or e-mailing comments
- Serving on citizen committees



Many participants commented on the need for a flexible planning process due to rapidly changing growth conditions and transportation demand.

Baseline Telephone Survey

In January 2003, Utah State University (USU) conducted a baseline telephone survey under UDOT's direction and supervision. It provided a random sampling of 4,000 Utah residents and covered the following topics:

- Transportation modes used most
- Perception of UDOT
- Understanding of UDOT's decision-making process
- Personal involvement in recent UDOT decision-making processes
- Opinions about the quality of transportation in Utah
- Opinions about priority needs for transportation improvements
- Demographic information

Survey details and results are located in Appendix B on the CD. Significant results include:

- A majority (74 percent) rated the overall condition of state highways and freeways as good or excellent
- A majority (68 percent) thinks UDOT places the right amount of emphasis on highways and other types of transportation
- More than 10 percent use public transportation at least once a week and 25 percent walk to work, to shops, or other destinations for transportation purposes
- More than 7 percent indicated they or someone in their family have special needs for transportation. Solutions suggested by survey participants included modifications to improve accessibility, remove physical barriers, and improve public transit scheduling
- Among those surveyed, construction and maintenance was the primary concern, followed by improving public transit and safety, and reducing congestion
- More than 20 percent had participated in previous UDOT transportation decision-making processes

Interviews and Focus Groups

The USU research team conducted face-to-face interviews and focus group sessions with UDOT staff (17 interviews; 4 focus groups) and people external to the organization (14 interviews; 5 focus groups). A total of 98 participants were involved. Internal participants included UDOT commissioners, administrators, public information coordinators, and regional maintenance staff. External participants included regional transportation and planning organization directors, natural resource and environmental agency staff, and representatives of four special interest groups.

The results of the interviews and focus groups identified the following major themes:

Addressing the Challenges of Comprehensive, Innovative Transportation Planning

Many participants commented on the need for a flexible planning process due to rapidly changing conditions regarding growth and transportation demand.

Another challenge to the planning process is the jurisdictional and decision-making separation between land use planning and transportation planning, and between the different private- and public- sector entities involved. Local land use planning decisions have implications for UDOT's transportation planning efforts.

The need for better coordination and information sharing between different transportation entities (especially UDOT, MPOs, UTA, cities, and counties) was frequently expressed.

Coordination, Leadership and Partnerships in Transportation Planning

Given the challenges described above, the need for coordination between transportation providers was recognized as the most critical element in transportation planning. Opinions varied on how this coordination should be facilitated and who should exercise leadership. Most participants thought UDOT's coordination role could be achieved through better communication, partnership arrangements, and cost sharing agreements.

Engaging Citizens in Transportation Planning and Project Implementation

Participants were critical, skeptical, or cautiously optimistic about UDOT's public involvement efforts. They felt UDOT is making positive changes by implementing new thinking, creating a different internal atmosphere, and exhibiting more openness and sensitivity externally.

The Long-Range Transportation Plan's Specific Needs

Most participants viewed Transportation 2030 as a document that could provide strategic direction but needed to be "out ahead of development" and flexible over time, with frequent reviews and updates. Participants thought the plan should pay close attention to the role of alternative forms of transportation, consider land use and transportation planning perspectives, and integrate with planning efforts undertaken by other transportation providers and land and resource management agencies. The need to integrate UDOT, UTA, and MPO plans was mentioned quite often, as was the need to correlate long-term planning with the need for shorter-term flexibility.

The main challenges were identified as:

- The state highway system reaching capacity
- Maintaining the existing highway infrastructure while growing the system
- Financial resources not keeping pace with demands

Community Outreach

Community outreach efforts were conducted throughout Utah to educate citizens about UDOT's planning process and identify specific transportation needs in each region. Rural communities were emphasized, because metropolitan areas are involved with long-range planning through Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs).

Coordination between transportation providers was recognized as the most critical element in transportation planning.

Participants felt their input needs to be early, frequent, representative, and taken seriously.

Many participants felt UDOT is making positive changes by implementing new thinking, creating a different internal atmosphere, and exhibiting more openness and sensitivity externally.

The need to correlate long-term planning with the need for shorter-term flexibility was frequently mentioned.

UDOT planners presented UDOT's decision-making process, distributed fact sheets, solicited community comments, and distributed postage-free comment forms in 43 communities at 74 meetings from February through May 2003. The community outreach presentations targeted existing community groups such as rural city planning commissions and/or councils, senior centers, Chambers of Commerce, clubs and civic organizations (i.e. Lions Clubs and Rotary Clubs), and the Utah Trucking Association membership statewide.

More than 1,200 people attended these community outreach meetings and approximately 1,400 comments were received. Comments were input into a database for ongoing reference and as a data reference element of geographically-based project files. Comments requiring near-term attention were forwarded to the appropriate UDOT region or department. The presentation schedule, comment list, topic category descriptions, and summaries of community outreach within each region are in Appendix B on the CD.

Comments were categorized by topic to identify and evaluate common areas of concern in specific regions and throughout the state. Frequently mentioned topics include:

- Safety
- Construction and maintenance
- Pedestrian and bicycle facilities
- Signs and signals
- Congestion (capacity, widening, passing lanes, etc.)
- Public transportation
- Transit for special-needs populations
- Expansion of rural transit system

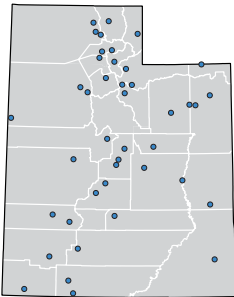
Issues and concerns commonly identified in public comments include:

- Future transportation projects need to address present and future growth
- Partnerships should be formed to plan and implement projects
- Transportation projects affect local economic vitality

Recommendations

Public involvement activities for Transportation 2030 establish a foundation for continued public involvement during planning and project stages. The following results and recommendations will help these future efforts:

- The baseline telephone survey can be conducted again to assess the long-range transportation planning process
- Community outreach presentations identified lines of communication and helped foster problem-solving relationships with rural communities throughout Utah
- Comments received establish a baseline of key concerns within a given community, which can be utilized as needs are considered for future regional projects
- Individual interviews and focus groups are effective ways of better understanding key constituents' perceptions



Community Outreach

- 43 communities
- 74 meetings
- 1,200 participants
- 1,400 comments



UDOT will continue to use strategies that foster active and early public involvement to help better understand community and regional needs and concerns.

The three-pronged public involvement strategy of a telephone survey, interviews/focus groups, and community outreach represents a balanced approach to understanding public needs and concerns. Future public involvement efforts should consider a combination of these and other strategies, to confirm that UDOT's priorities are consistent with public perceptions and transportation concerns. These strategies also yield a great amount of detail that can be used by the UDOT regions to make project development decisions.

